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MONDAY, JULY 29, 2019

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper lays out steps to make the River sustainable

Report highlights how to fill the water gap between what we have and what we need

ATLANTA—Lake Lanier is full and the Chattahoochee River running high. Chattahoochee Riverkeeper thinks that means now is the perfect time to talk about reducing our water use. Taking steps today will make communities that depend on the lake and river more resilient in the future.

After decades of [tristate “water wars”](#) and a deep record breaking drought in 2007-2008, Georgia just experienced one of the wettest years in history. Atlanta racked up 70 inches of rain in 2018 making it the second wettest year in the city’s history.

The Chattahoochee River is one of the smallest river systems in the entire country to provide water supply to a major metropolitan region of over 5 million people. And given the cyclical nature of drought and heavy rain, this means the region’s next big drought could be right around the corner.

Are Georgia communities ready? How much water do we have and how much do we need?

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper’s newly released report—[Filling the Water Gap: Conservation Successes and Opportunities for Communities that Depend on the Chattahoochee River](#)—provides some answers.

This report highlights eleven jurisdictions—cities, counties, and water utilities—that rely on water sourced from the Chattahoochee River, Lake Lanier and the river system’s tributaries. Nine of the eleven jurisdictions are located in the Atlanta region. The remaining two communities—LaGrange and Columbus—are in the middle Chattahoochee River Valley.

“The report’s goal is to highlight successes and opportunities to advance water conservation and efficiency in the Chattahoochee River basin,” according to Chris Manganiello, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper’s Water Policy Director. “Climate change is affecting rainfall and drought, so implementing aggressive policies and sustainable solutions are increasingly important.”

The Atlanta area has seen water consumption go down over the last decade, even with population growth. But the report warns that complacency and a lack of forward movement will leave the region unprepared for the return of drought conditions in the future.



“Georgia has demonstrated leadership before when it comes to water conservation and efficiency, but we must do more,” said Ben Emanuel, Atlanta-based Director of Clean Water Supply for American Rivers. “This report offers recommendations for how Georgia can build on its success for a water-secure future.”

After a review of utility water loss audits, current policy, and best practices in communities across the country, the report offers 11 recommendations—from changing the state plumbing code to enforcing and updating the Georgia Water Stewardship Act—to help put the water supply puzzle together as the state prepares to enter another round of regional water planning. The metro Atlanta region alone could save between 14 and 22 million gallons of water per day through smart water use policies and practices.

The report concludes these recommendations can succeed with a combination of individual action and leadership at the local, regional, and state levels.

“The outcome—reduced water use—will benefit our communities, economies, and hardworking river,” according to Jason Ulseth, the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper. “Better water management will leave more water in the river for downstream stakeholders, support fish and wildlife, and reduce the chance for thirty more years of water wars conflict between Alabama, Florida, and Georgia.”

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[Chattahoochee Riverkeeper's](#) (CRK) mission is to advocate and secure the protection and stewardship of the Chattahoochee River, including its lakes, tributaries and watershed, in order to restore and conserve their ecological health for the people and wildlife that depend on the river system. Join CRK for a [Relay Down the Hooch](#) to celebrate CRK's 25th Anniversary.